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MISS MEYER

By Margretta Scott.

THE family in the apartment below call me "the lady reporter," and I have no words of denial. But they don't know the depths of my iniquity—I am also a society reporter. I go to social functions in made-over clothes and describe in next morning's paper the gorgeous dress worn by a fat lady with protruding eyes. But I never write in the article what I am really thinking—how much better I would look in that dress, and how I want it, and how I rebel because I can't have it. That is written in the unpublished annals of my brain.

Because I can't have that dress, I do the next best thing—I copy it. Of course, the material is cheap, so is the lace; but I get the colors and the effect and I am better looking than the fat lady with the protruding eyes.

I am almost young and almost pretty. I would never be young again and I never was pretty. I just missed it; a fact I know and tried to keep my friends from knowing. Jack, once, told me I was beautiful; but Jack is prejudiced.

I divide the people in my life into four classes: there is Jack; my friends, for whom I feel varying degrees of fondness; society, which I loathe and am forced to cultivate, and there is the public.

I love the public. I like to watch the shop girls going out to lunch and to see them laughing and talking together. I like the beggars on the street corners; the woman with her clouded, old eyes, withered face and the impudently young flowers in her hand; the man who is sandwiched between two boards, each proclaiming the excellencies of crawfish soup at "The Tavern," while the man himself eats an apple, consolation for the crawfish soup he can't eat. And above all, I like Miss Meyer.

The first time I saw her was one morning on the street car. She fitted all the requirements of the old maid of funny paper fame,—all with one exception. She was thin, saffron-colored, manish; she wore a Panama hat, a tailored waist, nose glasses—and a beauty spot.

That beauty spot made her funny, pathetic, interesting. It meant that she was once young, once pretty, once feminine; it meant she wasn't wholly resigned to being old and ugly and efficient. It made me want to laugh and want to cry, and it made me look at my red tie and wonder how long before it, too, would mean as much as that beauty spot. Then I thought with a sudden fondness of Jack and I wondered—

I decided I would like to know the wearer of the beauty spot. She was sitting several seats in front of me. I got up and took a place beside her. She was reading the paper and I noticed that her eyes were riveted on a picture of "The Coming Dress of the Season."

I tried to imagine her in that dress. Mentally I removed the Panama hat, the plain skirt, the tailored waist; I even loosened her hair a little and made it softer about her face; then I hooked up "The Coming Dress of the Season." It didn't fit; it slunk on the thing, gaunt figure as if

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ashamed of itself; it seemed lonely and out of place. Only one thing was in keeping with that dress—the beauty spot. I looked at her as she was, sitting beside me, and decided she was better so.

As I know nothing but the most hackneyed ways of starting conversation, I asked her if she would mind having the window lowered. She said, "No," without glancing up. Matters hadn't progressed. Then I put my hand to my forehead and closed my eyes. After a while she asked me if I were ill. I answered, "Just a little car sick." She offered me her place by the open window and we exchanged seats. I said plaintively, "It's most inconvenient for a person who works down town to be car-sick. I'm on the car too much."

"It must be very bad. I'm sick on the water and I know what a fearful sensation it is."

So the ice was broken and I knew Miss Meyer. Before I got off the car I found out that she was a stenographer, lived alone, and was subject to hayfever.

After that I saw her often. Our conversations were not thrilling. She never showed me the beauty spot side of her, and that was what I wanted to see.

One morning the saffron of her cheeks was tinged by a faint red and the pupils of her eyes were big behind her glasses. She told me nervously that her aunt had died, leaving her some money, and this was her last morning down town. I asked her what she was going to do and she said that she didn't know; she felt lost.

Then Miss Meyer went out of my life as suddenly as she had come into it, and was replaced by other interesting pieces of the public.

A month later I got on a car I rarely use. I had been given the clue to a dressmaker who was both stylish and cheap—a combination. I have never found, but I was still hopeful. The neighborhood I passed was clinging to its departing shreds of respectability. Next door to the girl who blondined her hair and was drying it in the front yard, was a staid old woman wearing a neat brown wig with a piece of white tape sewed down the front, for a part.

All the houses were in a row and identically alike, but their windows told their stories. Some were curtainless, dirty, with the shades up to the top. They had a wide-awake, abandoned look. At night the rooms inside would be lit by gas-jets turned on to the fullest. You would see men playing cards, their hats on, their coats off; or a dance, with a girl banging the piano and chewing gum. Other windows were spotless, with neat

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